

PAX Panel: Developing an accessible future passenger experience

This is a special feature from *PAX Tech's* October 2024 APEX Global EXPO issue

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The World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 billion people globally experience significant disability, which is around one in six people. This fall, *PAX Tech* partnered with sponsor [Safran Passenger Innovations](#) (SPI) to bring a group of industry experts together for an in-depth discussion on how airlines and suppliers can make air travel more accessible to people with physical, mental and emotional disabilities.

PAX P A N E L

PAX Tech Business Editor Robynne Trueman moderates the sixth episode of PAX Panel, entitled “Developing an accessible future passenger experience.” Panelists include Louis Poupard, Software Product Manager, SPI; Duncan Jackson, President, [FlightPath3D](#); Eric Silverstein, VP of Operations & Technology Solutions, [West Entertainment](#); Ainhoa Serrano Buces, Social Impact Manager in [Iberia's](#) Sustainability Department; Corinne Streichert, Founder and CEO of [IFECTiv](#); Tudy Bedou, Chief Technology Officer, [Thales InFlyt Experience](#); Jamie O'Donnell, Lead Aviation Designer, [Muirhead](#); Andy Masson, VP of Product Management and Strategy, [Panasonic Avionics Corporation](#). Check out the PAX Panel roundtable via this link, and learn more about what it covers below.



Wholistic, comfortable, collaborative

Accessibility along the end-to-end passenger journey is not a new concept, but it is evolving as technology progresses. The panelists noted several areas in which airlines and suppliers must focus to enhance the flying experience for people with disabilities, such as mobility, effective communication and an intuitive user experience to create a more comfortable overall experience.

This can look like “seamless communication for all passengers, comfort not only related to the seat but also with IFE, providing different languages, subtitles and so on,” notes IFEctiv’s Streichert.

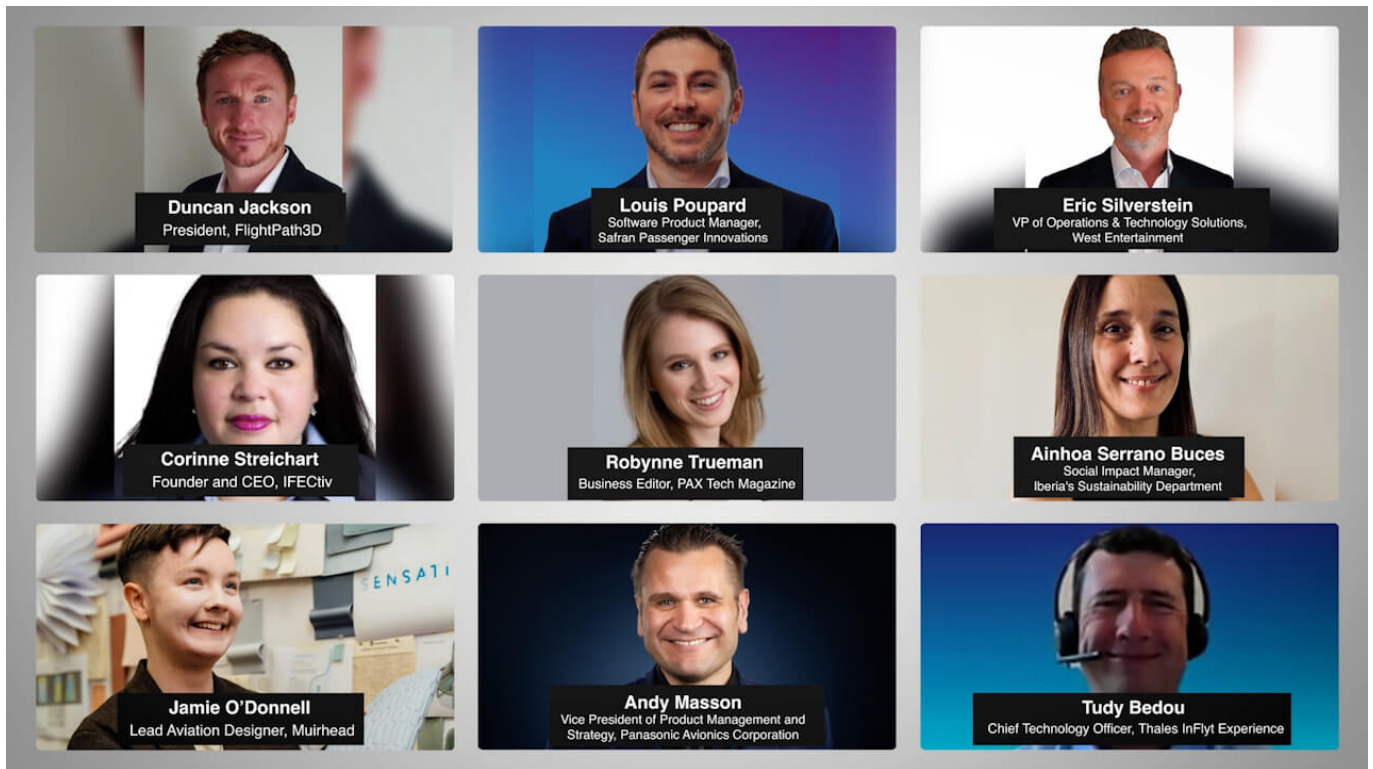
Thales InFlyt Experience’s Bedou highlights the importance of this wholistic approach in the global airline industry.

“We have passengers from a very, very big variety of geographies and ages and horizons and, let’s say, cultural differences and providing them with a way to interact with the system based on their needs is probably one of the biggest challenges. But in the end, I agree with the team that it needs to be a wholistic approach to the entire experience.”

O’Donnell at Muirhead says the wholistic approach can also help reduce stress for passengers who are neurodivergent. “Air travel is stressful for anyone, but if you’ve got some sort of barrier that’s making it inaccessible to you, that’s where we need to start collaborating with each other and make the environment just more comfortable.”

Masson, Panasonic, adds that the goal is to make the inflight experience enjoyable and memorable for all passengers by reducing those stressors. “Everyone remembers their first flight,” he says. “I think we are all part of that ecosystem to perpetuate that magic of flight. And we can do that with our products, with our approaches and make it inclusive for everyone.”

FlightPath3D’s Jackson suggests that the primary focus for airlines and suppliers should be a people-first, inclusive approach to designing the experience.



This PAX Panel, sponsored by Safran Passenger Innovations, is moderated by *PAX Tech* Business Editor Robynne Trueman with panelists from Safran, Iberia, Panasonic, FlightPath3D, West Entertainment and more

“If you come at it from that angle, then you will acknowledge the age differentials, disability differentials and that really complex varied approach,” he explains. “That includes not only that age barriers but also those based on disability, that’s both cognitive, visual, audio and mobility. If you take that inclusive approach, that should be a foundation to start with what problems you’re solving.”

The panelists also emphasize the importance of industry-wide collaboration and developing a standard for accessibility onboard.

“We’ve been working internally at SPI to try and make more accessible inflight entertainment products,” says SPI’s Poupard. “It’s difficult for passengers to know what to expect inflight, in terms of accessibility features. So how do we create a wholistic approach that’s anticipatable by passengers? I think that’s the real trick.”

Streichert outlines the challenges a passenger may face when navigating different IFE systems onboard an airline on a multi-leg journey. She explains that collaboration at the product development level is a good starting point with benefits from sharing information with other industry suppliers to allow everyone to work from the same standard of accessibility.

Jackson adds, “We can create the shared knowledge pool which would avoid duplication. We can channel resources into innovation. We can build that consistency because cognitive overload is something that’s under- addressed right now with the complexities of the systems that we’re building.”

Communication is key

The panelists made one thing very clear—the importance of communication between suppliers and

airlines, and airlines and passengers.

Iberia's Serrano says that beyond inflight entertainment, communication is also important throughout the whole passenger experience—whether the passenger needs something during the flight, or the airline needs to communicate an emergency.

She also notes that content service providers and airlines need to be on the same page when investing in technology, including AI that focuses on special needs and specific feedback mechanics to receive information from passengers.

West Entertainment's Silverstein agrees that dialogue with the passenger is an essential part of fine-tuning how content is delivered onboard.

"Understand that audience; feedback on what's working, what's not working. Bring that information back to the content community so that it's not only just repurposing what we can actually get access to, but what can we do better as well," he says.

Poupard concludes that progress—not perfection—is the way to move the industry forward.

"We really value feedback and we understand that you're never going to get something perfect the first time. But, getting it out there and getting feedback and iterating leads you to make the most improvements in the most meaningful ways. Even negative feedback is good, right?" he asks. "You can change things for the better."